

Better Homes and Centers



Michigan Department of
Social Services

Quality Programs

Issue 21 Summer 1989

QUALITY DAY CARE *What Will It Take?*

*By Stanley Roth, Supervisor
Division of Child Care Licensing
Michigan Department of Social Services*

Just when we needed her most, Mary Poppins is gone. The demand for child day care has skyrocketed. Far too many children are being left "on their own" in our Michigan neighborhoods. The child-care issue just won't go away. A little wishful thinking may stimulate us to come to grips with some of the issues involved:

1. I wish more people in our community understood what quality child day care is. According to the National Day Care Study, the recipe is simple. There are three key ingredients: group size, caregivers who possess specific child-care training, and a strong link between the child's family and the day-care setting.

The data is in. Children do best when they are cared for in small groups. Big is not best for young children. Unfortunately, studies also show parents are frequently drawn to a child-care setting because of its "flashy" externals — plush carpeting, clever advertising, piped-in music and "cute," neat surroundings.

In a quality setting, children are mixed in small groups with nurturing adults who are trained in child development or early childhood education. Caregivers positively or negatively affect the emotional development of our youngsters. Trained caregivers spend more time "being with" and playing with the children. Untrained adults merely watch or "babysit."

The adult caregiver is the single most important ingredient. Caregivers and teachers serve as models for children. It is through relationships with affectionate, well-trained caregivers that children learn about themselves, about the world. Without adequate adult interaction, children have only their peers to guide them. They should not be "on their own." Unfortunately, there is a severe shortage of trained, child day-care workers.

In small groups, supported by trained caregivers,

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DIRECTOR'S CORNER

Quality! Have you noticed the increase in the use of that word in recent years? Television and newspaper advertisers are using the letter Q with great frequency.

The Division of Child Day Care Licensing has joined the quality revolution. The benefit that we hope to achieve through our quality enhancement efforts is improved regulatory services. Our organization's mission is to develop an atmosphere where both our providers and our division are working collectively to provide humane and safe circumstances for children in day care. Our partnership with you has enhanced Michigan's day care services network. Through our quality improvement initiative we want to make it even better.

- We are committed to continuous improvement with a focus on preventing licensing system problems.
- We are stressing a more participative style of operating our division. The collective talent, experience, knowledge and skills of everyone in the organization are utilized.
- We are striving for a genuine spirit of teamwork within the Division through mutual respect, continuous improvement, effective communication and pride in the work we do.
- The heart of our quality improvement program is a people-building philosophy. Staff will be trained in techniques that enable them to make significant contributions to their jobs.

I wanted to give special emphasis to one other aspect of our approach to quality improvement: an overwhelming customer focus. The quality of our service will be defined and measured in terms of meeting customer expectations. We see you, the providers of day care, as vital customers. We have a variety of customers, some of whom are internal to the Department of Social Services. Our list of customers also includes children served by day care facilities; the parents of those children; legislators representing the will of the people; the Governor and his advisors; and neighborhood groups. Our diverse customers will often have competing interests. The task of clearly defining our customers and their needs is a welcome challenge that we are addressing.

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children thrive. Children are consistently more verbal, more apt to take part in play and learning opportunities. They also exhibit less aggressive behavior. In a competition-conscious society, children generally make the greatest gains on standardized learning tests.

Finally, quality child care means there is constant, consistent contact between families and the child's caregivers. Parents and caregivers communicate, communicate, communicate.

2. I wish there were more money available for child day care. Parents alone can't afford the cost. Providers are financially pressed to provide adequate care. Caregivers are poorly paid. Public funding is extremely limited. Child day care is the single social service needed by all segments of our society today. Yet, child day care is a very low priority in state and federal social service budgets.

We could create a Child Day Care Action Fund much like an Economic Development Foundation. This foundation could provide a source of funding to help increase the number of trained child day care workers and child development specialists in Michigan. It could be an opportunity to help working families obtain necessary funds to pay their child day-care system. It would provide start up dollars for new day-care operators. It could be an opportunity for us to educate parents on what to look for when seeking child-care arrangements. It could stimulate government and private business to invest on behalf of our children.

3. I wish for a local, million-dollar donor to get the fund rolling. If it works for museums, it can work for kids.
4. I wish Michigan considered child day care to be as critical and necessary as public utilities. We need day-care services for our children, just as we need streets and sewers and municipal water and power. This recognition will take us a long way toward investing in a future for our community.
5. I wish public policy makers and politicians would not play partisan politics with child care. They must look at the data, examine the research and make data-driven decisions, which will support families. Our child day-care "system" is malnourished, undersubsidized and largely unrecognized. Families need more incentives and support to be able to rear their children at home.
6. I wish we would not forget for whom child care exists. It is for children. Cost and convenience are significant factors in making a day-care choice, but children's needs should take precedence over both. Parents, ask yourselves how you would feel if you were the one who spent your week in day care in this facility or day care home.
7. I wish parents would *not* leave their children on their own, alone. We need a growing recognition in our community that leaving children alone, on a

regular basis at the age of 6, 7, 8, 9 or 10, is simply not healthy for our children.

8. I wish we valued the child day-care workers in Michigan. Child day-care workers' prestige is very low. Their salaries are minimal, yet we expect "quality care" from them. A person providing day care for our children deserves a decent living wage. The pay rate must be increased to increase their stature, to instill confidence and to reduce the high



turnover of staff in day-care facilities. Surely, we can find a way.

9. I wish there were greater public recognition of the service provided by day-care home operators in Michigan. Many women — in the privacy of their homes and in our neighborhoods — are there for families and children every day, all day. These providers of care are frequently isolated from each other, with little or no professional support or recognition. They deserve our applause.
10. I wish the general public understood Michigan's Child Care Law. The law calls for a system of child-care services that are "conducive to the welfare of children." We need more day care licensing personnel. Sixty-eight committed people are the state's only staff assigned to oversee "a system" of 3,275 licensed child care centers, 10,792 registered family day-care homes and 1,046 licensed group homes in Michigan.

If we are to build a realistic, day-care system worthy of our children and our community, these wishes need to come true. We don't need Mary Poppins. We need to work together, as partners, in child protection.

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QUALITY vs. COMPLIANCE WITH THE RULES

By Sara B. Clavez, Executive Director
Saginaw Valley Regional 4-C

Following the licensing rules does not guarantee good child care. The rules were never intended to define high quality child care.

Licensing rules are minimum standards intended to reduce the risks to children in care. They are developed very carefully by a committee representing the Department of Social Services, the Public Health Department, the Fire Marshal, early childhood educators, child care providers and parents. The public has the opportunity to comment on the committee's proposals at several public hearings before they are adopted and given the force of law.

A proposed rule will not survive this process if it is only *good* for the children. There must be considerable evidence that a rule is necessary to protect children from harm before it will be adopted.

Fortunately, most child care centers or day care homes want to do more than protect children from harm. Most people who go into this business care about children and want to do a good job. If you are one of these motivated people, the licensing rules can alert you to dangers of which you may not have been aware and spell out precautions you should take in order to safeguard the children and reduce your own liability risk. The licensing rules also protect your business from unfair competition by someone who might offer lower prices for a substandard service. Your licensing consultant can be a resource as you work out efficient and effective ways of complying with the rules.

Licensing rules provide the foundation for a good child care service. It's up to the child care center or day care home operator to build a quality program on that foundation.

Your licensing consultant is also a resource you can turn to as you work to improve your service above the minimum standard. Other resources that can help you set quality goals for your program are the National Association for the Education of Young Chil-

dren (N.A.E.Y.C.) Accreditation Criteria and the National Credentialing Program's Child Development Associate (CDA) Competency Standards.

Early childhood development researchers have identified group size, adult-child ratio and caregiver training as the most significant factors in child care quality. In each of these factors there is a difference between what is required by licensing rules and what is recommended by quality criteria.

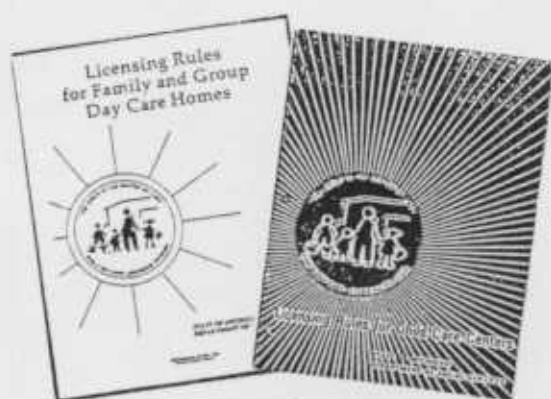
Licensing rules for centers do not address group size. Specific recommendations by age are made in the N.A.E.Y.C. accreditation criteria.

There is quite a gap between the two standards for adult-child ratios. For 2½ to 3 year olds in centers, for example, licensing rules allow 1-10 while accreditation criteria recommends a ratio of 1-5 or 6 but no more than 1-7 for this age group. For many programs cost is a major factor when they consider staffing above the minimum required by licensing rules. Some programs achieve their quality goals for adult-child ratio by recruiting parent or community volunteers, student interns or work training program participants.

There is also a big gap between the two standards for training. Licensing Rules for child care centers have no specific training requirements except for one program director. The new Licensing Rules for Family and Group Day Care Homes include a requirement for 20 hours of training including first aid, CPR and child development to be completed within 2 years of being licensed. In contrast N.A.E.Y.C. Accreditation Standards recommend that those who carry out program activities independently and who are responsible for the care and education of a group of children should have a CDA Credential or an associate degree in Early Childhood Education or Child Development.

There are many low cost training sources available for child care. The Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children and the Michigan Council of Cooperative Nurseries both have annual conferences with numerous workshops. Local affiliates of these organizations may offer workshops in your community. The local intermediate school district office may offer workshops open to the public. Your local 4-C office also offers workshops for new and experienced caregivers, provides consultation services and administers a scholarship program which pays the cost of CDA assessment for those below a certain income level.

Although Licensing Rules do not guarantee a good program, they provide the starting point. Those who have made the effort will tell you it is much easier to run a quality program. Children and parents will both be happier and your job will become more satisfying and enjoyable. So read the other articles in this issue and build quality into your program.



BETTER NOT BIGGER

*By Julie Schexnalldre
Family Day Care Provider
Saginaw County*

A healthy home is one where individuals can relax and let their hair down. It offers security, comfort, and physical and psychological nourishment. Likewise, a healthy family is a group of individuals who share a unique bond. Such a healthy family accepts and loves its members under all conditions at their best and at their worst. They challenge each other to do more and they accept each other just as they are.

Such is the challenge of a quality family day care home. A family day care home is one in which one person cares for a group of six or fewer children in a private home setting. Having worked as a Family Day Care Provider for the past five years, I'd like to share some of my insights as well as some successful experiences.

Although children of working parents are away from their own family and home for several hours a day, there's no need for parents to suffer "working parent guilt" when their children are left with a trained caregiver who provides a home away from home. In such a home a child has the advantage of having the same caregiver from early infancy until entering school.



My family day care home is a large home situated within several acres of woods. The location is close enough to town to make it convenient for parents, yet rural enough to provide children with an outdoor science lab, animal life, gardens, sand, trees, and hills.

No matter what the planned curriculum calls for, the notion of being "family" always allows for abandonment of those plans or change of curriculum when the interest of an individual can be met. Recently, as we enjoyed a mid-morning snack together, one of my four-year-olds mentioned that she felt like going some-

where today. So we put our heads together and agreed to put aside our painting and clay and take a trip to a local pet shop to buy crickets for our lizards. The size of our group made such a spontaneous diversion possible and provided an enriching opportunity for decision making, language development and social responsibility.

The flexibility that children have within their second home gives them a sense of security and comfort. Our kitchen allows for easy clean up of messy activities such as paint, clay, rice, water play, cooking, cutting and gluing. Accessible shelves allow children to select paper, writing materials, and manipulative materials.

The dining room is our music-movement center. Children's records and a guitar enhance the learning of songs and rhythm while a path around the table is used for practicing marching, galloping, hopping and skipping skills so necessary for growing little bodies. Parachute games also take place here.

The sunroom adds to our science curriculum by providing an almost natural habitat for year round plant observation and care, as well as close up views of small animals such as fish, lizards, newts, bunnies and new born kittens. The feeding of wild birds year round teach the children to observe migratory habits, learning names but above all, to acquire a real respect for nature. Unwanted bugs or spiders in the house are always captured, observed and then set free outside.

The family room is the center and work place of our budding engineers evidenced in breathtaking block structures of towers, castles, expressways and bridges. Here, too, the housekeeping tent, dress-up clothes and many more creative toys add to the children's dramatic and creative play.

The living room is a quiet place for reading, story time and story telling. It's a place to go to be alone or to play quietly with a friend. And everyone knows it's the place to gather for that special story before nap time.

The family day care home is a special home-away-from-home — a special nurturing second family. It's a place for lots of kisses and hugs and an atmosphere with the proper balance of freedom and limits.

I have a large home, a large outdoor area, the expertise to deal with a whole classroom of children, and a waiting list of three years. Many suggest that I become a group home provider. In this day of consumerism it's easy to think bigger is better. But is that really the best we can do for these little ones? Personally, I feel there is much to be gained when our entire little family can share a meal around the same table or all have a turn to be rocked before naps. In our family day care homes, let's strive to be BETTER not BIGGER.

GROUP SIZE IN RELATION TO PROGRAM QUALITY IN CHILD CARE SETTINGS

By Patricia F. Hearron
Licensing Consultant, Saginaw County

Because licensing is meant to establish those minimum standards which insure the health and safety of children in care, it does not address the issues of quality care which are above and beyond minimum standards. One such area is group size which can have a surprising impact on the overall quality of a program and centers that wish to do more than meet minimum requirements will take this variable into account. A group consists of children under the care of a specific caregiver or team of caregivers within an individual room or clearly defined space within the room.

Many adults have observed that they themselves feel disoriented and confused in crowds. College students complain about the depersonalized treatment they get in large lecture classes. If these situations are jarring to us, think how much more confusing the hustle and bustle of a crowds can be for the young child whose world, only yesterday, was limited to her family and an occasional playmate.

One of the axioms of good early childhood education is that it meets children where they are and begins with the familiar before moving on to the exotic. That's the reason for all those September units on "Me, Myself, and I" or "Body Awareness." We assume that the child is most familiar with herself and will, therefore, find it easier to talk about this topic in the strange new world of preschool.

In the same sense, it's wise to gently ease the child into group relationships. We do this by insuring that he doesn't have to become acquainted with too many new people all at once or share the attention of the new adult in his life (teacher) with too many rivals.

The National Academy of Early Childhood Programs recommends a maximum group size that varies with the age of the children: eight for infant, 12 for toddlers, 20 for 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds, and 24 for 6- to 8-year-olds. They emphasize that the ideal group size would be even smaller than these maximum limits.

In addition, research supports the idea that smaller group size is reflected in a higher quality program. The National Day Care Study (1979) found that in smaller groups:

- teacher engage in more social interaction with children;
- children displayed more cooperation, verbal initiative and reflective-innovative behavior;

- children showed less hostility and conflict and spent less time wandering or uninvolved with activities;
- children scored higher on the Preschool Inventory and the revised Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.

Note that the research does not claim that preschool children cannot be trained to follow directions and function in large groups. It merely suggests that children gain greater benefits when they are allowed to remain in smaller groups. Group size is one of the structural components of quality child care. By limiting the number of children in a group, providers create an



environment where adults can respond to individual children with warmth and support, and children can interact with each other constructively. It is the quality of these human interactions that constitutes quality care, but it is the limited group size which makes such interactions possible. Staff training is, of course, very important; but, even well-trained staff need manageable group sizes to function at their best.

The next time you find yourself thinking that the children in your center are acting wild lately, consider group size as a possible factor. If you feel that you've been spending all your time and energy moving from crisis to crisis during free play, it could be because there are just too many people to interact productively. The child who wanders aimlessly past all the activities you've set out and can't seem to settle down at group time may have a problem that needs special help, or he may be simply unable to cope with so much stimulation and activity at one time.

In summary, decreasing group size can result in more cooperative, less hostile children, who are "on-task" more often and show greater gains from early childhood programs. As a result, the adults working with these children will be able to spend more time productively involved with them and less time correcting undesirable behavior. This should lead to happier children, happier caregivers, and happier parents: a small change with big results.

QUALITY CHILD CARE FROM THE BOTTOM UP

By Nancy Nizinski, Assistant Director
St. Mary's Children's Center, Saginaw County

Quality child care is what every dedicated child care provider strives towards. Although there are many books, seminars, conferences and support groups that can help a provider attain higher quality, one of the best tools I have found is self-evaluation. During this process, you can focus on your areas of concern and discuss what needs to be done in your child care setting. Our center tried this method because some children's aggressive behavior was disrupting our setting. We wanted to figure out how to combat this behavior and to create a higher quality center in the process.

We began with a meeting at which we developed three different lists: What we do best; What I would change if I could; and My biggest concern is... After completing our lists, we discussed each category and found that many of us had the same feelings about our center and what problems needed to be addressed.

We came up with four different problems that needed to be solved: diapering, room arrangement, staffing and parent involvement. Partly because of our hospital setting, we keep detailed records of every child. We didn't want to jeopardize this procedure; however, we felt that placing children on the diapering table on a rigid schedule was taking away our caregiving time. We decided to check children's diapers periodically as they were playing instead of interrupting them. This would save time for the staff, leaving more quality time for the children.

The second problem was our room arrangement. On the toddler side of the room three cribs were taking up too much play space. The cribs were being used by the infants who didn't have enough room on their side. In order to get rid of the old cribs, we would first have to order new ones. We elected to go with the smaller portable cribs so that they could all fit on the infant side. That would solve our toddler play space problem.

The next problem was staffing. Our center had recently begun using volunteer staff. The volunteers didn't have the knowledge of child care that our staff had, so we found ourselves having to teach the volunteers as well as the children. This meant they couldn't pull their weight in the room. Constantly having to tell them what to do made the regular staff very uptight, thus taking away some of our quality. We decided that in the future, any volunteers used would be in addition to the regular staff needed to meet required ratios. This seemed to please our part-time staff whose hours would no longer be cut.

The last problem we wanted to talk about was the lack of parent involvement in the center. This was of great concern to the staff even though it's a problem

shared by many centers. We did admit that since none of us were parents ourselves, we didn't know how busy they were and we would have to put ourselves in their places and try to work from there.

To make the parents want to come, we decided to get more of their input by creating a parent advisory committee. This would give us a good base to work from. We also decided to find some interesting speakers and to provide refreshments. These ideas should bring parents to our meetings.

Completing our self-evaluation, we were excited to get our new ideas into action and decided to meet again in one month to assess our progress. This way we wouldn't "slack off" after a week and we would have something to work towards. Although we knew we wouldn't be able to make all the changes we wanted to in one month, we felt that we would be able to get a good start.

After the month was up, our diapering was going much smoother. The children seemed more relaxed and so did the staff. Our room arrangement hadn't been altered very much because we were awaiting the arrival of our new cribs. We had removed a couch from the room which gave us more play space. The staffing problem solved itself when the volunteers left. In the future, volunteers will not be counted to meet adult-child ratios. In the area of parent involvement, we asked two parents from each age group, (infant, toddler and preschool), to serve on our Parent Advisory Committee and set the date for the first meeting.

Progress was being made slowly but surely. We were happy with what we had done so far, but we knew we still had a lot of changes to make to produce even higher quality in our center.

Since we are in the business of caring for children, we have the responsibility of providing the highest quality care possible. This is hard work. It's not something that can be accomplished overnight, however, with commitment it can be done. Be patient — but be persistent. High quality child care is possible and can be attained with the right combination of creativity hard work, genuine caring and dedication.



THE GROANS AND BENEFITS OF PARENT MEETINGS

By Kathleen Wright
Group Day Care Home Provider
Washtenaw County

Parent Meeting ... Parents' Night ... Open House ... Parent/Teacher Day ... No matter what you call them, these oh-so-necessary events in early childhood programs bring on groans from teachers, family day care providers and directors alike. Quite often the groans are accompanied with thoughts like "Why have them? They are so much work. Parents don't attend!" Maybe it is time to rethink parent gatherings. Why should early childhood programs hold them and how can they be improved?

There are many reasons why parent gathering are important, but to sum up the reasons in a word: **COMMUNICATION**. It is vital to quality early childhood programs, both home and center based, that there be good communication between parents and caregivers. Communication can be facilitated through daily verbal contact, individual notes and phone calls, newsletters, and posted messages. While each one of these methods has its own range of benefits, parent meetings can widen the range still further.

Parents can benefit greatly through parent gatherings. When moms and dads attend a group meeting they have the opportunity to relieve doubts or questions they may have about routines of the children, topics

thereby aiding daily communication. At parent meetings, moms and dads also have the opportunity to meet other parents, a benefit unique to group gatherings. Daily transitions can be relieved when parents know the other parents they are rubbing elbows with at drop-off and pick-up time. And parents can benefit from peer support that can develop once they get to know each other. "Allison has just recently started waking up with nightmares. Has your Robin had any of that?"

Caregivers also benefit from group meetings. A parents' night can offer an easy means for educating parents. Unlike the often hurried communication that tends to take place at daily pick-up time, a teacher can use the less frazzled, informal time during parents' night to get to know the parent better. A more relaxed relationship can help further communication and help the teacher plan a program that is a better extension of the child's home environment. Also, details that might have slipped by in the daily rush are more likely to sink home when told to parents whose whole attention is called to the matter.

Knowing all the reasons for having parent meetings helps motivate the caregivers to sponsor them, but motivation alone doesn't always bring about well attended, highly beneficial gatherings. It takes organization and planning for such events to reach their full potential. Many caregivers working in both center and home based programs have used their imaginations and their knowledge of parents and their schedules to plan highly successful meetings.

The time when the parent meeting is held can be an important factor of attendance. Post a sheet offering two possible evenings and have parents sign up for evenings that they prefer. Or, having monthly or bi-monthly meetings on alternating weeknights might get better attendance.

The hour also makes a difference. Instead of the traditional 7:30 meeting, starting at 8:30 might encourage a parent to come after the children are tucked in bed. Lunch time meetings are a nice option for parents who value evening family time and have lunch time available for other things. Parents arrive after the children are down for naps.

In centers with full day programs, successful meetings between parents and staff of just one particular class can take place because staff from other classes are available to oversee the naps of those children whose teachers are out. Lunch can be served by the center, done potluck style or brown bagged.

A Saturday morning or a Sunday afternoon could prove to be a good meeting time. Saturdays are the best time to plan what is usually called a "work day" to build new outdoor climbing equipment, have rooms repainted or have toys rejuvenated. Most parents are willing to volunteer a few hours of wielding a hammer or paintbrush when they know that their children are going to benefit. A day spent this way can lead to a

(Continued on page 10)



discussed in day care, and the attitudes of the caregivers. Getting to know the staff at the center can also help relieve guilt that parents may feel for leaving their children behind. Even though quality centers and family day care homes have open door policies that invite parents in anytime, many parents do not, or can not, take advantage of this. Having a special time to explore the physical surroundings, without the presence of little ones, can help parents feel more comfortable when they arrive and depart everyday from the facility,

CHILD CARE IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD: AN ASSET TO THE COMMUNITY

*By Frances M. Houseal
Group Day Care Home Provider
Washtenaw County*

It's obvious what benefits are received by the parents and children involved in a quality home-centered child care program, but have you ever thought about how a family or group child care home can benefit one's community? Home day care tends to bring a neighborhood together. Often children live in the same area in which they receive child care. A certain camaraderie is developed between parent, provider and children. There is a caring bond. Other neighbors who do not have outside jobs volunteer to act as an emergency contact, or to sub when the provider is ill. Christmas parties and summer gatherings bring everyone together.

Child care gives the providers an opportunity to develop individually and be proud of what they can do. It creates jobs not only for the provider, but for helpers, subs, and resource people in the community. The child learns a great deal by visiting local establishments and participating in library, music, art, fitness and a variety of other programs — all offered by neighbors.

Those children who are school-aged also benefit. After school care is a definite need and can be found in your own community. Summer care is also readily available. This no doubt cuts down on the problems of the "latch key" child. There are activities to do at the child care home, and friends to be with, all in a

supervised, wholesome environment. Vandalism and harassment from other children can be greatly reduced in communities that offer home child care.

In many neighborhoods all the adults are away at work all day long. These homes are begging to be vandalized and robbed in the middle of the afternoon. In communities where child care homes are thriving, crime can be reduced due to their visible presence. There is always someone around, moving about in the neighborhood. These extra eyes and activity help keep the neighborhood safe.

It is a shame that some local zoning boards are trying to, or already have, eliminated child care homes, or have so overly restricted them that they are frightened out of business. If they could only see the great benefits child care homes can offer, they would surely support their presence in the neighborhood.

Child care in the home offers a loving, rich environment, right in the community where the parent and child are most comfortable. It gives parents another option in choosing the best child care program for that unique little person. It is a great boon to the entire community.

(Editor's Note: Of course many of the benefits Ms. Houseal describes apply to center-based care as well.)



QUALITY BEGINS AT HOME

By Barbara C. Schmidt, C.D.A.
Group Day Care Home Provider, Ingham County

As the legislature tackles the questions of family and group day care licensing and zoning ordinances this year, we continue to see a dramatic rise in professionalism and dedication in the field of in-home child care. Providers are forming associations, becoming a Significant Interest Group of the Michigan Association for the Education of Young Children and forming networks across the state and the country! The important job of helping to shape the future generations has, at long last, gained recognition.

Taking the step of becoming licensed is a very important factor in providing quality early childhood programs. While the standards are minimal at this point, licensed providers often excel far beyond requirements. A quality program includes well thought-out plans concerning the areas of:

1. The developmental level of the child.
2. Curriculum and materials.
3. Staff (development, qualifications, parent interaction).
4. Administration.
5. Physical environment.
6. Parent-family relationship.
7. Nutritional needs.
8. Health and safety.
9. Program evaluation system.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children which sets standards for excellence in early childhood programs, defines a "high quality" program



as "one that meets the needs of, and promotes the physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of the children and adults — parents, staff and administrators who are involved in the program. Each day of a child's life is viewed as leading toward the growth and development of a healthy, intelligent, and contributing member of society."

The single most important aspect of quality in child care at any level, however, remains a nice day for a young child!



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DIRECTOR'S CORNER . . .

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Our key link with you, our provider customers, is the staff of licensing consultants who work directly with you. We encourage you to make any suggestions that you have for improving the quality of our regulatory services.



Ted deWolf, Director
Division of Child Day Care Licensing

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- Child Development Associate Assessment System and Competency Standards of the National Credentialing Program*, Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 1718 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, DC 20009, 1-800-424-4310.

Call Michigan 4-C Association, (517) 351-4171, to find your local 4-C office.

ATTENTION:

Home Care Providers
New Family and Group
Day Care Rules
will take effect October 3, 1989
If you have questions contact your
licensing consultant.

PARENT MEETINGS . . .

(Continued from page 7)

feeling of real camaraderie among parents and caregivers. And both get a very different perspective on the other when roles of caregivers and parent are switched to architect and seamstress.

Quite often, mothers seem to have much better attendance records than fathers when it comes to parent meetings. To combat this problem, one provider started what she calls "fathers' night out." All the fathers are invited over to this provider's house for discussion of their toddler's life in day care, held over pizza and a suitable beverage.

Parent gatherings can be planned on a regular basis or they can be held whenever a topic of importance arises. A September meeting, when most programs enroll new families, is a good time to have a get together to help parents feel comfortable with the facility, staff and other parents. It is also a good time to discuss center policies before incorrect procedures become bad habits. This is true even though the policies were discussed at the time of the initial parent interview, and even if they are pointed out in your handbook. It can't hurt to communicate them again.

Parent gatherings are a lot of work for caregivers and parents. Careful thought, creative planning and organization are needed to assure success. But certainly the communication, education and fun that result are worth the effort . . . and the groans.

Please send articles for consideration in future issues to:

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PROVIDER'S CORNER



By Diane J. Nickols, PA-C
Physician Assistant and
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During a statewide training conference for licensing consultants a panel of six day care providers representing all types of care, met to discuss the relationship between providers and the Licensing Division. The panel agreed unanimously that providers and the Licensing Division share the common goal of ensuring a safe, secure and enriching environment for children in Michigan.

Panelists responded to five basic feedback statements:

1. I feel the role of licensing is to ...
2. I feel the provider's role is to ...
3. What does the Division of Child Day Care Licensing do that is helpful?
4. What can be improved?
5. Suggestions for how to improve.

Readers of this article are also invited to respond by writing to *Better Homes and Centers*.

Providers feel that in addition to providing a safe environment for children, the role of licensing is to help parents have peace of mind by meeting their expectation for uniform standards across the state.

Providers saw the Division as helpful to licensees by

- providing support and consultation when initiating a program
- taking time to develop a partnership
- providing ongoing communication to keep them updated
- maintaining a level of professionalism
- giving immediate feedback about findings

Providers see their role as performing "the second most important job next to parents: providing care for

children." They offer diverse services so parents can have choices. They provide love, warmth and nurturing as well as intellectual stimulation, socialization and educational opportunities. Finally, they provide a support for parents.

As one might expect in any questionnaire, the topic of what can be improved commanded the most attention. Here are selected examples:

- Fire and health inspectors should be familiar with what is expected in the day care setting specifically.
- Don't give mixed or opposing messages about what the licensing laws, rules and regulations require. Try resolving conflicting rules between licensing agencies.
- Explain the intent behind some of the rules.
- Be more aware of how what the Department does affects the provider in relation to, for example, USDA food reimbursement or DSS payments.
- Do orientations with an experienced provider there to answer questions.
- Make policy clarifications available to all providers as they occur in the Department.
- Increase the amount of time available to consultants to provide ongoing consultation to assist centers and homes in improving services we provide to children.
- Make sure all DSS staff respect confidentiality when providers call in with a Protective Services referral or problem.

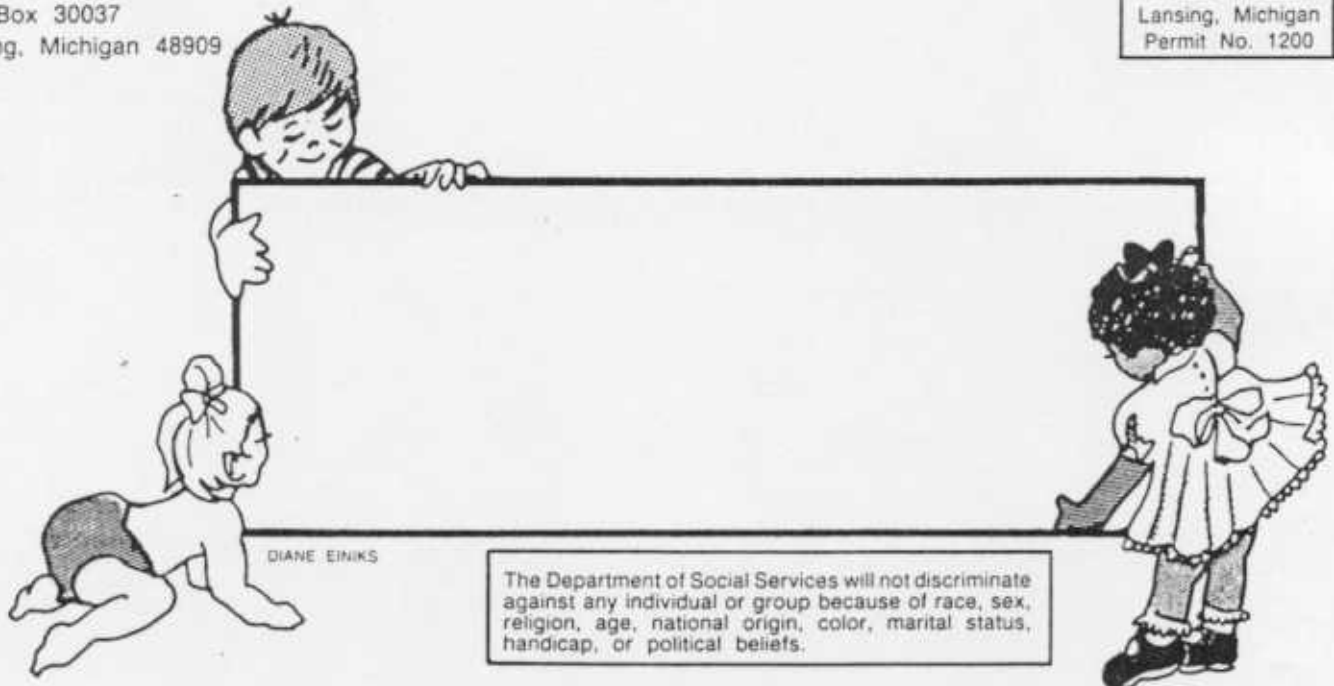
Providers also offered suggestions for how to improve.

- Give a "common sense" exam to providers before a license is issued — questions about things like discipline.
- Provide for more individual follow-up or technical assistance. Not all providers have the same level of expertise.
- Make health rules more explicit.
- Require training/workshops for all licensees and registrants.
- Do provider satisfaction survey.
- Follow-up with providers by phone on a more regular basis.
- Hire more licensing consultants.

The Better Homes and Centers editorial staff thanks the concerned panel of providers who gave of their time and energy to supply these insightful comments and share their views. Continued dialogue that fosters a creative and enduring partnership between providers and the Division of Child Day Care Licensing Staff will ensure the well-being of children in child care throughout Michigan. Thanks to those of you who continue to contribute to this ongoing dialogue.

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